

Narrative and Visual Sources of Saint Anne's cult in Late Medieval Hungary (14th-16th centuries) in a Comparative Perspective

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PhD thesis, 2015

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Saint Anne's cult has been mostly overlooked in the Eastern part of Central Europe until now, and in our case specifically in medieval Hungary. The saint's cult was mostly spread in Western Europe (France, German-speaking areas, England); consequently thorough studies have been published regarding these areas. Previous studies on medieval Hungary treat iconographic, ethnographic and textual sources. Nevertheless the complex analysis of Saint Anne's cult in its hagiographical (e.g., the cult of the Virgin Mary) and geographical context has not been carried out by handling different sources together yet.

Nevertheless, there are some studies with different approaches, especially concerning ethnography, iconography, and literature. These studies present general information (ethnography) on the saint's cult, stylistic influences on the saint's representations (iconography), literary sources concerning her legends in Hungarian codices (literature), but do not give an overall view of the devotion to Saint Anne, and do not treat it by considering late medieval piety. On the other hand these works set the basis for further studies.

In my study I pursue the idea of the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of Saint Anne's late medieval Hungarian devotion. The first part of the thesis gives an overview of the cult in Western Europe, especially in German speaking territories. I analyze in a more detailed manner the sermons written to Anne, and also woodcuts produced in German speaking area. I focus on these sources because the cult of the saint could have been most easily spread through these vehicles. Though textual sources were analysed by Angelika Dörfler-Dierken, she didn't enter in a detailed interpretation of the sermons. Therefore I considered necessary an analysis by considering the times' hagiography. The woodcuts were not analysed at all with this entirety, taking into consideration all the images survived from the 15th century (based on Paul

Heitz's edition), by German scholars. Finally, it is the German speaking territory from where the cult of Saint Anne came in medieval Hungary especially in the late middle ages when the cult of Anne blossomed spontaneously. In the second part of my thesis I interpret the Latin sermons produced in medieval Hungary in Observant Franciscan milieu and the Old Hungarian legends copied also in Franciscan and Carthusian milieu. I interpret these sources in the frame of late medieval hagiography. This approach allows me to analyze, based on the different points of view, how the texts were used or written, and finally through this to clarify the different, and in some cases the debated, aspects of Anne's cult. This is a philological approach which was not used until now by scholars in the case of Saint Anne legends in Hungarian context. The Saint Anne sermons written in late medieval Hungary were not analyzed at all.

I also take into consideration the vast visual material (frescoes and altarpieces) from late medieval Hungary. Beside the basic database of Dénes Radocsay which offers the major part of the information I gathered further data on visual sources from the Hungarian National Gallery and the Institution of Art History. As in Central Europe the genealogical representations (Anne Trinity and the Holy Kinship) were mostly present instead of Anne presented alone (characteristic for France) or the Education of the Virgin (characteristic for England) I analyse this type of iconography. In my analyses I follow not only the changes occurring in the iconographic type, but also the enriching aspect of the images from hagiographic point of view. Thus the textual and visual interpretations complement each other giving a more comprehensive view on the different aspects of the cult. Further on in a case study I treat the background information on some Saint Anne altarpieces from Upper Hungary in cases where I could find enough archival information on the persons, institutions who ordered them. Due to this I can approach to a certain extent the problem related to the identity of cult's propagators.

And finally I enter in a more detailed interpretation with regards to the Virgin Mary altarpiece of Biertan (Birthälm, Berethalom, Romania). My special attention to this altarpiece is based on the fact that the construction, adjustment of the altarpiece went through different phases, episodes by this influencing the iconography of the altarpiece itself. I follow this procedure through the fifteenth and sixteenth century, when many changes occurred in the ecclesiastical history.

The present thesis is an example how the cult of a saint can be captured by the historian through different types of sources. These sources speak to the historian in different manners

depending on where were they produced and by whom, by which category of the society and for whom. Based on these factors I tried to define the different aspects and features of the cult in general and specific terms. I also intended to identify the promoters of the cult in late medieval Hungary, and the factors that contributed to the spread of the saint's cult and to its increase. Thus, through different types of sources we can grasp the different layers of Saint Anne's late medieval devotion.

The archival and liturgical sources draw the countours of the first dedications to the devotion to Saint Anne. I did not include though the liturgical sources in my thesis; I only mentioned them where I treated the textual sources of Saint Anne's cult. Therefore I refer only to the archival sources in this respect. According to these the first promoters of the saint's cult are the Order of the Austin Hermits (XIVth century). Nevertheless different religious orders, as for instance the Poor Clares and the Paulines, promoted the saint's cult at this time. The toponyms dedicated to Saint Anne (Liptovská Anna, Sântana de Mureș, Sântana Nirajului) refer to the presence of the cult in rural environment. It is important to mention the case of Sântana de Mureș, one of the earliest patronyms. The presence of Franciscans in Târgu-Mureș most probably had a cultural influence on the region as Carmen Florea suggested in her thesis. Therefore a Franciscan distribution of the cult of Saint Anne can be suggested in the case of Sântana de Mureș (XIVth century). Their literary work, the Teleki codex, which contains the most complete Saint Anne legend written in Hungarian vernacular two centuries later, is a proof of the cult's importance in Franciscan environment (1525-1531) as well.

Based also on the surviving textual evidence it seems that one of the most important promoters of the saint's cult in late medieval Hungary were the Franciscans. The Saint Anne sermons written by the Observant friars, Pelbartus de Themeswar and Osvaldus de Lasko, allow us to outline the main features of Franciscan perception of the cult of the Virgin's mother. Unfortunately, we do not have preserved more Anne sermons written by Franciscans in order to obtain a more general view. Nevertheless as the sermons were written to be used by priests, it is important to know what theological message they transmitted.

According to David L. D'Avray¹, sermons can be interpreted especially through their symbolism. Sermons have a logical construction in which all the arguments support Saint Anne's status among the saints. Although Saint Anne's cult was based on apocryphal sources, as mother

¹ David L. D'Avray, "Method in the study of medieval sermons," 3-27.

of the Virgin and the main figure of Christ's family she needed to be venerated. Thus her sanctity consisted in her motherly status.

As Saint Anne's *vita* (the *trinitubium* legend) had been subject to controversies and prompted a critical attitude on the part of some theologians, one should take into consideration the different aspects and manners of presenting Anne's life and her three marriages in texts. Thus analyzing Saint Anne's *vita* presented in sermons and codices requires us to consider moral concepts of the period regarding virginity, marriage, and the family as well. A social and philological approach to the topic allows us to interpret the texts from the point of view of the devotion of the saint from different social groups, and, in a bigger context, to see how it is integrated into late medieval devotion.

Franciscans propagated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Theological debates on the dogma concerned the figure of Saint Anne as the mother of the Virgin as well. Due to this fact earlier scholars (Sándor Bálint, Anna Veres) connected the development of the cult to the partial acceptance of the dogma at the synod of Basel. The references to the dogma of Immaculate Conception in the sermons of Pelbartus are diverse. On the one hand, they are symbolic through the structure and comparisons; the direct connections between mariological symbols and Anne support the saint's cult and through the comparisons with the symbols of the Immaculate Conception dogma Anne herself was sanctified. On the other hand, his statement on the dogma is very explicit: God sanctified his own tabernacle through the miracle of Anne and Joachim, and delivered the Virgin from the Original Sin in the womb of her mother. He also mentions that the soul of the Virgin was conceived in the womb of her mother, thus her soul is of human origin. Further comments refer to misleading ideas concerning popular devotion; the author specifies the fact that the Virgin was conceived in the womb of her mother and not "by a kiss". Thus, it appears that Mary's Immaculate Conception and Anne's conception were frequently confused in popular devotion. Osvaldus, his fellow friar, on the other hand, neglects the matter of the dogma. This leads us to think that there is not a direct connection between the cult of Saint Anne and the Franciscan support for the dogma of Immaculate Conception, as earlier scholars supposed; rather their related treatment is a matter of personal preference. The relevant difference between the two preachers' approaches might be explained by Pelbartus' special devotion, as fervent supporter of Mary's cult, towards the veneration of the Virgin's mother, Anne.

The two preachers do not defend Anne's trinubium, but they emphasize repeatedly the saint's family ties in their arguments concerning the importance of saint's cult. She embodied ideas of kinship. This aspect made her worthy of the status of mediator in the *via salutis*. She is the model of "good wife" by her exemplary behavior as underpinned by the enumeration of general moral teachings. Her devotion is recommended to all categories of believers, all social statuses of a woman's life: that of the virgin, the wife and the widow.

In the case of sermons the Saint Anne legend was meant to be read by a priest in front of an audience. Thus the texts transmit the ideas of ecclesiastic power toward the lay persons. In the case of the Hungarian vernacular legends they were intended to be read as devotional readings by the members of the Order of Franciscans, the female Third Order, Poor Clares (Teleki and Kazinczy codices). In the case of the Érdy codex's Anne legend (written by a Carthusian monk) this was again directed to a larger audience.

The Teleki codex's Saint Anne legend, miracles and prayers provide further information regarding the saint's cult. The Teleki codex (1525-1531), copied by a Franciscan friar and several Beguines in Târgu Mures is based on the *Legenda sanctissimae matronae Annae*, written by an anonymous Franciscan friar, which appeared in several variants after 1496, this corresponds to the saint's legend which circulated in Western Europe. The author of the legend underlines the causes of Anne's marriages several times, not only her obedience to the law, but also to God's will. Thus, each marriage had a divine purpose. The three grape vines, symbolizing the three Marys (Saint Anne's daughters), have a Eucharistic value. The large family, Jesus and the future apostles, acted for the salvation of humanity. Consequently, Saint Anne has an exceptional status among women. The Kazinczy codex written for the same category of believers (lay brothers, nuns or Beguines) omitted the story of Anne's second and third marriages. As Kathleen Ashley formulates: "A culture in which Saint Anne could be so popular was clearly one undergoing a transition, and Saint Anne was an apt sympobc mediator of the contradictions of that transition, functioning as a symbol for the contested issue of marriage in late medieval society."² The Franciscans, who copied the legend from the Teleki kodex in the Kazinczy codex, written especially for nuns and lay brothers, considered, probably, that there was no need for a detailed elaboration of Anne's vita. It was sufficient enough to present her symbolizing the idea

² Kathleen Ashley, "Image and Ideology: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Drama and Narrative," in *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, 119.

of the good wife and godly marriage through the legend of Anne's and Joachim's wedlock. The Érdy codex's Anne legend transmits the same idea to the reader. On the other hand, we have to mention that if we take into consideration the content of the Kazinczy and the Érdy codices the writers most probably were defending the Immaculate Conception in their writings. This latter aspect gives us an explanation why they intended to omit the lot debated legend of Anne's trinitubium, which indirectly questioned Mary's immaculate nature.

The miracles included in the codex tell even more about mentality problems. Ton Brandenburg's study on the legends and miracles of the saint in Northern Europe identify Anne as a patron saint of married couples and of motherhood in miracle stories. In his view most of the miracles refer to urban society and to daily life. The miracles narrated in the Teleki codex have characters of different social status (widows, virgins/nuns, hermits, clerks, a bishop and a saint) and refer to fertility and motherhood only in the case of a single story (the legend of Procopius), which leads to the idea that the miracles were collected with the purpose of being read by nuns. Many of the miracles support the idea of Anne's three marriages with different stories in which nuns play a role. The aim of these stories was to convince doubting nuns to reconsider their attitude toward Saint Anne and to believe in her, which was the only way for eternal life. The ideological shift toward the compatibility of holiness and physical motherhood in the late middle ages is well exemplified by the story of Birgitta of Sweden, who was herself a mother saint. Saint Anne is defined as a "lady of all wedded folk" in this story. What message could such a story have had for a Beguine? This story strengthened Saint Anne's cult, a woman who, although married three times, became a saint. The legend of Saint Anne is explicit on the matter of Anne's three marriages: She obeyed God's will by marrying her husbands in order to have the three Marys. Thus, fleshly lust was not an explanation for Anne's three marriages.

Through the Saint Anne miracles in the Teleki codex one can seize the different attributes of the saint. She is not only a mother saint; she acquired other attributes too during the Middle Ages. Her help was required, along with that of the Virgin and Jesus, in many dangerous situations and by dying persons. Who are the persons which required the saint's help? Anne Trinity was a mediator at the deathbed of a hermit, a clerk, and a nun. Thus all the characters of the stories come from an ecclesiastical environment, which barely accepted the compatibility of motherhood (three marriages) and holiness. The protagonists of stories relating the devastating anger of Saint Anne, giving deterrent examples of what can happen to those who do not believe,

are a bishop and a nun, too. Consequently, these stories were collected with the purpose of strengthening the Saint's cult among nuns/Beguines. All these characters pray to Saint Anne together with her daughter, the Virgin Mary, and her grandchild, Christ.

The codex gives practical information on how to pray to Saint Anne by the different miracle-stories, thus the texts have a didactic feature as well. For instance as she gave birth to the Virgin and died on a Tuesday, she needs devotion on each Tuesday by three Paternosters and three Ave Marias. Through the different devotional practices given by the codex it became obvious that there is a unity, when addressing to Anne Trinity. Thus her person is strongly linked to that of the Virgin and her child and her cult developed connected to the cult of the Virgin.

The different source materials, through the interrelations among them, give insight into the different features of the cult. The Franciscan sermons outline the Franciscans perception on devotion to the mother of the Virgin and offer also information on popular devotion. The Teleki codex's legend, miracles, and prayers (including the Kazinczy codex's prayer) reflect mentality issues regarding the saint's cult. This latter case underlines the saint's salvific feature, which can be identified as a major factor in the promotion of her cult among nuns and Beguines.

The late medieval blossom period of Saint Anne's cult can be detected in some Upper Hungarian cities where a priest, a community, an organization were so emotionally attached to the saint's cult, that he or it also was engaged in ordering or dedicating an altarpiece to the saint's honour. In some cases more than one Saint Anne altar were functioning in the settlement. In the second part of my thesis I present a large amount of visual sources from late medieval Hungary. This overview allows me to collocate the images (frescoes and altarpieces) in the Western-European iconography of Saint Anne (altarpieces and woodcuts). As the woodcuts represent one of the main instruments to spread the iconographic motifs, I found important to follow through the different examples the changes that occurred in the Saint Anne representations. Another important aspect of this type of source is that they are frequently connected to prayers, textual messages. Thus by reciting them the meaning of the different Anne representations can be easier understood. We can say that the visual sources from late medieval Hungary reflect the same changes that occurred in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century in Western Europe. Although regional differences can also be observed, the Hungarian visual material shows a shift in time regarding the appearance of some aspects/attributes of the representation of Anne.

Further on in my thesis I studied the background history of some images, concentrating on Saint Anne altars from Košice, Prešov, Bratislava, Spišská Nová Ves and Bardejov, all from Slovakia. I based my selection on where I could find enough information on the historical background of Saint Anne altarpieces with special reference to promoters of the cult. Through this latter approach I concentrated especially on the commissioners of the images. By this, I introduced into the study the question of Saint Anne brotherhoods as well.

In conclusion we have to say that the social background of the founders of these images varies from brotherhoods (*Mater Misericordiae*, Bardejov) to burghers (Košice). A single Saint Anne image created by a devoted burgher is known from Bardejov. Only in the case of Bratislava we have proof on a Saint Anne brotherhood sponsored the Saint Anne altar (Carmelite cloister). In the case of Spišská Nová Ves we don't have enough information in order to decide reliably whether the devotee burghers or the Saint Anne brotherhood patronized the Saint Anne side altar.

In the last part of my thesis I focused on one particular case, the Virgin Mary altar of Biertan. My special attention to this altarpiece can be explained by the peculiar way in which the image of Saint Anne's extended family was included in the iconographic program of Biertan. Though as we can see in the case of the above mentioned cities from Upper Hungary the Saint Anne altars were present in relatively close settlements to each other, in this latter case we discuss a geographically well-separated phenomenon. One specific question would be: how does a separate Saint Anne altar fit in the iconography of the Virgin Mary altarpiece by becoming the predella? How this was reflected by the program of the altar? Who initiated this adjustment? By analyzing the different phases in the altar's establishment, scholars (H. Krasser, M. Crăciun) noticed the change in the iconographic program from glorification of the Virgin and her role as an intercessor into the sacrifice of Christ as a saviour. In the original iconographic program of the altar (that of 1483) the emphasis was laid on the figure of Virgin Mary, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and Incarnation. The introduction of Christ's life on the festive side of the altar provides the altar with connection to the sacrament. In 1515 the iconographic emphasis moved to salvation, given by the sacrifice of Christ. The role of the intercessor in salvation is represented by Mary and Anne on the predella's iconographic motifs – the central image. Mary's role as an intercessor was already present on the original altar (1483). This character was even more emphasized in 1515 by the adjustment of the predella and of the pediment. But it must be

mentioned that the predella also laid an emphasis on Mary's and Christ's origin, respectively it emphasized Christ human origin, the earthly trinity. These changes promoted by the priest Johannes gave the original iconographic program of the altar another, new, enriching aspect. Though the original iconography is respected, there is a shift in the emphasis from Mary's life to her origin. Priest Johannes gave to the altar of Virgin Mary a more emphatic iconographic content, also reacting to the promotion of Saint Anne's cult that was flourishing in the German speaking areas at that time. In this respect his wish to promote Saint Anne's cult in Biertan can be easily explained. The adjustment of the predella added to the original number of images a large amount of people (25) from Christ's larger family, the Holy Kinship. If taking into consideration Johannes priest's action regarding the order of predella and its adjustment to the main altar dedicated to the Virgin, it can be said that this is a unique iconographic solution for an altarpiece. Therefore, it is also a unique solution for distributing Saint Anne's cult. Such entire representations of the Holy Kinship are known only in the case of separate altarpieces. Finally, it is worth noticing that the merger of the Virgin Mary altar and cycle with that of the Holy Kinship represented on the predella is a unique phenomenon, and is not to be found anywhere else in late medieval Hungary but solely in Biertan.

The actions of the priest Johannes reflect a special care for Saint Anne's cult. We have to take into consideration the fact that in the territories inhabited by German settlers the cult of Saint Anne was well promoted. In these terms the members of the Holy Kinship family, represented in urban clothes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were models for the inhabitants of the oppidum in their everyday life at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This aspect of Saint Anne's cult is well exemplified in the case of the Upper Hungarian cities as well. As we could see in the case of Košice, Prešov, Bratislava, Spišská Nová Ves, Bardejov inhabited by an important mass of German settlers, they promoted the cult of Saint Anne. Among the promoters we can find laypeople from different social strata. This initiative is present among laypeople with individual initiation (Košice, Prešov, Bratislava), common initiation (Saint Anne brotherhood? – Bratislava) and clerics (Mater Misericordiae brotherhood – Bardejov). As we could follow through the example of Biertan even clerics acting individually could take the initiative to strengthen the cult of Saint Anne. Unfortunately, in the case of Spišská Nová Ves we do not have enough information to decide whether the devotee burghers or the Saint Anne brotherhood administered the Saint Anne side altar.

The above mentioned sources reflect the complexity of this topic. Though my main focus aimed at the narrative and visual sources, in many cases the archival sources gave the necessary surplus information for instance on the social background of a specific Anne altarpiece. Saint Anne's late medieval Hungarian culture is as multifaceted as the sources which are depicting it.